From small things... the origins of Point Blank

The idea for a Bruce Springsteen fan magazine happened in the summer of 1980. I was living alone in south London, working at, and about to lose, my first full-time job. I'd been introduced to Bruce's music in 1977, when I first heard 'Born To Run' (just the title track). I remember all the fuss about his London debut and the album in 1975, but I wasn't that interested at the time; put off, like many, by the overkill. It wasn't until 1978, when I bought 'Darkness On The Edge Of Town' for the same friend who had played me 'Born To Run', that I began to listen properly and 'discovered' Bruce Springsteen for myself. What crystallised the discovery was hearing a couple of tapes of Bruce's live shows, which brought the album tracks to life even without seeing the performance. (I did not experience a live show until April 1981.) By late summer 1980 I had collected the four albums, heard four or five tapes and was enough of a fan to order the American fan magazine 'Thunder Road'. Reading the enthusiastic responses from fans in the issues covering the 1978 US tour was probably what made me decide to try something similar for myself in Britain.

Knowing little about Bruce beyond the few issues of 'Thunder Road' and a book by Peter Gambaccini, I advertised for interest, encouragement and help in the music press. The response was enough for me to go ahead and produce the first issue of 'Point Blank' that autumn: a 12-sided, duplicated, stapled A4 magazine, typed and lettered by myself and copied at less than £10 for 200 copies. I had written 80% of the material, apart from a review and the first half of a two-part article on Bruce's career. Again advertised in the music press, the response was such that by Christmas 1980 I had enough contributions to make a second issue, this time 80% others and 20% my own work.

I sold all 200 copies and reprinted the first issue many times, as I did with the second and third issues, these being photocopied until the summer of 1982, when issues 1-3 were considered out of print, despite continuing demand for them. In order to concentrate on future issues I had to abandon the work involved in continually producing back issues. The second issue 'Winterland in Jungleland' was printed by offset litho and cost 60p a copy to produce, selling at 50p(!) each. Consequently issue No.3 had to be cheaply photocopied (I became unemployed just before No.2 was published), relying greatly on help from friends with access to copying equipment.

I found that Point Blank was sustaining my morale as well as helping me financially during most of 1981, especially the April-June tour of Europe. It was most encouraging to stand outside the concert halls during Bruce's tour holding the magazine and to be approached by readers and correspondents I'd never met before, and even stay with them for the provincial shows. No.3 was meant to include a last-minute review of the first British date, in Brighton, on the back page, for publication in March – before the postponement of the UK tour and the re-shuffle of the dates.

When Point Blank No.4 was ready I'd started work again as a printer, and was able to pay a friend in the trade for litho production of the new issue: a 1,000 run costing about £300. Unfortunately I was unable to print No. 5 from the same source, but by summer of 1982 I was able to print that issue myself at work: 500 copies for £60! After two years I finally broke even with my most satisfying issue to date. I need a reprint already. At the time of writing, work has begun on Point Blank No.6, hoped to be due in the spring of this year, by which time a new Bruce Springsteen LP should also be released, with a European visit likely to follow.

Whatever happens in the future of Point Blank (and I can never see further than the next issue!), it has already proved totally worthwhile to me and has left me in great debt to Bruce for all the magazine has brought me; a lot of fun and satisfaction, some lessons in patience and hard work and most of all, lots of amazing people, including my best friends and loved ones. Not to mention an increased understanding and respect for the integrity of my favourite musician. I've grown up some, and gained a lot of confidence and happiness – this has been my most fulfilling time and I wouldn't have missed a moment of it.

To Bruce, and everyone, it's been incredible. Thanks.

Dan French
(from 'The Fever' by Dave Percival, 1983)